

communities, and the remaining residences in the high dune management unit.

Structures that are visible above a high ocean-facing dune line are visually incongruent, as are poorly maintained structures wherever they occur. Within the communities, great differences in architectural style or the condition of residences may result in visual incompatibility or degradation locally.

Dumps and trash deposits behind the dunes and on the beach are significant sources of visual degradation. Most of the material in the interdunal area has been intentionally discarded by community residents, but a substantial amount of trash, often originating as far away as New England, is washed up on the beach.

The trash that litters the bay-bottom and bayside beaches is more likely to originate within the Long Island region. In view of the large volume of cultural debris already in the estuaries and ocean, trash removal is certain to be a major management problem for an indefinite time.

D. Cultural Resources

1. Brief History of Fire Island Area

European contact with the lands now comprising Fire Island National Seashore may have begun as early as 1524, when Giovanni de Verrazano may have passed along the coast after leaving New York Harbor. Dutch and British settlement of Long Island occurred during the 18th century, and the eastern part of the Fire Island barrier beach was purchased from the local Algonquin Indians by Colonel William Smith in May 1691. This section subsequently became part of the Manor of St. George. An inlet in the general vicinity of the present Fire Island Inlet was created by a storm in 1688 and subsequently widened in 1690 and 1691, but the name Fire Island Inlet was not recorded until 1781.

There are conflicting views as to the origin of the name Fire Island. According to one hypothesis, the name is a corruption of the Five Islands patented by William Nicholls in 1688 in what is now the western end of Fire Island. Under another hypothesis, the name originates from the fires reportedly set by pirates to lure vessels to shore. Regardless of whether either hypothesis is true, the name Fire Island has long been applied to the western part of Fire Island, as now roughly defined by the communities governed by the town of Islip. The more easterly part of the barrier island was known as

Great South Beach until about 1920, when common usage extended the Fire Island name to the rest of the island.

As late as 1773, the island was reportedly a sandy beach, with only a few patches of coarse grass, and visited only occasionally by fishermen, whalers, and shipwrecked sailors.

Fire Island's history is interwoven with that of Great South Bay and the offshore ocean waters. From the earliest days of Indian occupation, and during the 300 years since the first Caucasian set foot on the island, man's life and livelihood there have depended upon the sea. Pounded by frequent and violent storms, the outer sands and shores are strewn with the wreckage of long-forgotten vessels. During the latter half of the 19th century, lifesaving stations protected the 55-mile sweep of beach from Fire Island Inlet to Southampton, providing relief huts stocked with food and water that saved the lives of countless shipwrecked sailors and passengers. These stations were abandoned by the mid-20th century, and only one--a modern Coast Guard station near the Robert Moses Causeway--exists today.

Three important industries developed as a result of the rich ocean and bay resources along Fire Island. Whaling was the first industry. The first American whalers were the early settlers who learned the trade from the Indians and hunted whales in small boats off the south coast of Long Island in the 1600s. As early as the 1650s, one shore whaler named Isaac Stratford had a whaling station on Fire Island and a commercial operation for rendering whale oil, which was shipped to New York. Shore whaling was carried on from the middle of the 1600s well into the following century.

The south side of Great South Bay was renowned for its highly productive commercial oyster beds, which were harvested so intensively in the late 1700s and early 1800s that oysters had to be planted and cultivated before the Civil War to prevent loss of a valuable industry.

Fertilizer, produced largely from menhaden (a fish), became a major regional industry in the 19th century. Fleets of oceangoing craft draped their nets offshore and returned to Fire Island laden with fish. A processing plant was established on a site just northeast of the lighthouse.

Fire Island's history was also linked with the slave trade. In the early 19th century, a large stockade with a huge fireplace was established on the island for shackled slaves who were landed there prior to shipment inland.

Modern development of Fire Island began in the 19th century from the lighthouse site eastward. In 1855, David S.S. Sammis of Babylon constructed the famous Surf Hotel on a 120-acre tract immediately east of the lighthouse. This large three-story frame building was one of the earliest summer beach resorts on the Atlantic coast and had accommodations for about 1,000 guests. In its heyday, the Surf Hotel was one of Long Island's most popular resorts, with steam-ferry service to Babylon and horse-drawn carriages to transport visitors from a mainland wharf to the railroad station. A short distance from the hotel, Western Union constructed in 1868 an eight-story-high marine observatory and telegraph station, which operated until 1920. In 1892, during a regional epidemic of cholera, the old hotel was purchased by New York State for a quarantine station. It was leased for resort use the following year, but subsequent commercial use was not successful, and in 1908 the land was authorized as a public park. The hotel structure was destroyed by fire in 1918. In 1924, administration of the tract was taken over by the Long Island State Park Commission as its first unit, and it is now the eastern unit of Robert Moses State Park.

East of the state park, the oldest community is Point O'Woods, founded in 1854 by the Long Island Chataqua Association on a 175-acre bay-to-ocean tract. A meeting house to accommodate 1,500 people was built, but it was subsequently demolished in 1898 when the property was acquired by Point O'Woods Association, which used the lumber for boardwalks. In 1895, the Women's Christian Temperance Union built an ocean house for guests, but by 1910 the structure had greatly deteriorated. A portion of the structure was rebuilt and is now part of the dining room of the Point O'Woods Inn, which is presently threatened by a rapidly eroding beach.

Saltaire became the island's first incorporated village in 1917, followed by Ocean Beach in 1921. Settlement of these and several other communities dates largely from the first and second decades of the 20th century.

2. Historic Sites of Documented Significance

A cultural resources survey of Fire Island National Seashore was done as part of the 1975 resources inventory for the national seashore and the William Floyd Estate. Subsequently, archaeological surveys were conducted at the 90-acre Fire Island Lighthouse tract and at the William Floyd Estate.

a. Fire Island Lighthouse

The Fire Island Lighthouse tract comprises 115 acres of federal land, of which about 15 percent has been classified as a historic and cultural area. It contains the 167-foot-tall brick lighthouse built in 1858, as well as the lighthouse keeper's quarters at the base of the structure. The base of an earlier lighthouse, built around 1826, can still be seen a few hundred feet from the present one. This land was first acquired in 1825 for use as a lighthouse site because of the great frequency of shipwrecks near the shores of Fire Island; at that time the site was the westerly tip of the island. In January 1974, the beacon light was relocated to a 202-foot water tower situated about 2-1/2 miles west of the lighthouse, considerably closer to the island's tip, which is now 5 miles west of the lighthouse.

The lighthouse is eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. There are no other known structures or sites on Fire Island's federal lands that are listed in the February 1, 1977, National Register of Historic Places or meet the criteria of the National Register.

b. William Floyd Estate

The 612-acre estate of General William Floyd, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, is the prime historic and archaeological resource under the jurisdiction of the national seashore (see the accompanying photograph). It is situated about 3 miles northeast of Long Island's Smith Point in the town of Mastic. This tract of farmland is the remnant of an 18th-century estate that comprised several thousand acres of land. About 58 percent of the 612-acre tract is classified as a historic and cultural area.

The property contains a 20-room, two-story white frame house, originally built around 1729, but containing 19th- and 20th-century portions. It has been in continuous use by the same family for more than 2 centuries.

Besides the house, which is completely furnished, there are ten outbuildings, a private cemetery with a burial section for slaves, historic roads, gardens, trails, hedges, fields, and other minor sites of historical significance. Of great importance is the collection of the original papers of the Floyd family, already owned by the National Park Service.

The property was donated to the National Park Service by the Floyd family in 1965 with Mrs. John T. Nichols--a direct descendant of the signer--

Resources of the Fire Island Lighthouse tract.

View of Fire Island Lighthouse tract from the west showing the historic lighthouse and lighthouse keeper's quarters. Building in right center is U.S. Coast Guard Annex which was partially gutted by fire in 1972; radio tower is at rear. Buildings to left of Lighthouse are used for storage and as garage space for Kismet Fire Department. Eastern unit of Robert Moses State Park and the western communities are in background. (NPS photograph, March 1965)

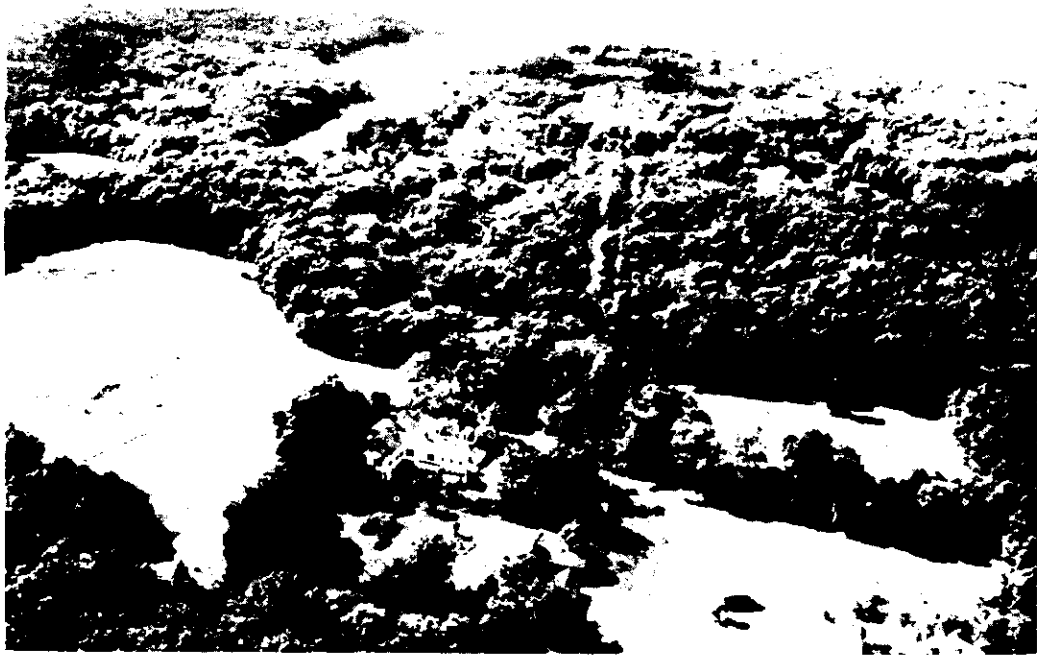


Freshwater pond in northwest corner of the Lighthouse tract is one of Fire Island's rarest environments and provides valuable habitat for water birds and aquatic life. (Photograph taken September 1974)



The "skirted" pine in the lower right center of the photograph is a unique natural feature of the western part of the Lighthouse tract. The "skirt" of this old pitch pine is scarcely more than a foot high, while the central bole of the tree stands about eight feet tall. The tree is surrounded by a zone of nearly bare sand, the origin of which is unknown. The unusual growth form is thought to be in part due to the effects of salt spray. (Photograph taken in September 1974)





View of the William Floyd Estate Manors and appurtenant buildings looking southeast toward Moriches Bay. Home Creek is in background. (Photograph taken in September, 1974)

retaining a 25-year lease agreement. On October 1, 1976, Mrs. Nichols gave up her lease on the main historical section of the estate, the 33.8 acres on which the manor house is located. Park Service personnel now live in trailers near the house. Maintenance of the cemetery, occasional patrols, and some environmental education activities presently are the only Park Service seashore management efforts. The residence needs rehabilitation, a maintenance program, and protection of the house furnishings from fire hazard and theft.

A historic resource study, completed in June 1974, is adequate for formulating the history section of a historic structure report. Historic American Buildings Survey drawings and the architectural section of the historic structure report have been completed.

The Floyd Estate has been on the National Register since April 1971.

3. Other Historic Resources

Because of the frequent remolding of the Fire Island landscape by wind and wave, and other adverse factors in the environment such as salt spray, there are few intact structures more than 50 years old on Fire Island and adjacent islands in the bays. A few homes in Point O'Woods and elsewhere may date from the early 20th century, but no data on these structures are presently available. None of these homes is presently owned by the federal government. None of the lifesaving station complexes established on Fire Island during the 19th and early 20th centuries is extant, although portions of the old docks remain at Forge Point and Whalehouse Point (both on the bayside of the island), and some of the buildings have been converted to other uses.

At least two structures in the communities are of historical interest. The dining room in the Point O'Woods Inn incorporates part of the ocean house built in 1895 by the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Although originally built some distance from the dunes, the inn is presently threatened by the progressive erosion of the dune line. The second structure, the community center in Fire Island Pines, is a 19th-century building that was once part of the Coast Guard station known as Lone Hill.

Other known historic resources in the national seashore consist of sites of former structures on land and the sites of shipwrecks at sea. A 1965 master plan for the seashore identified the locations of six former lifesaving stations and 12 shipwrecks. (The addition of the lighthouse tract would add the location of a seventh lifesaving station.) However, according to available information, more than 60 vessels have been beached or sunk

on the shore, shoals, or in deeper waters off Fire Island (out of about 550 for Suffolk County as a whole). The earliest known shipwreck dates from 1657, when the Prins Maurits was grounded on Fire Island with 160 to 180 Dutch immigrants and soldiers. Wrecks off Fire Island have occurred periodically since that time, with the most recent one in 1947, when a steamer was lost near the present Fire Island Coast Guard station.

Old lifesaving station sites, shipwreck sites, sites of former resort hotels (the Surf Hotel built in the eastern unit of what is now Robert Moses State Park, 1855; the Pirates House in Cherry Grove, 1869; and the White House Hotel on Water Island, 1890), and the sites of former fish-processing plants near the lighthouse and in Seaview are of historical interest and valuable for interpreting the colorful maritime history of Fire Island. However, similar sites occur along the entire south shore of Long Island. None is known to be strongly associated with events or personages important to national or regional history.

4. Archaeological Sites

An archaeological survey of Fire Island was made in 1974 (Vetter and Salwen); no significant sites were found. The apparent absence of archaeological remains is almost certainly due to landward and westward migration of the island, periodic formation of inlets, and other forms of natural disturbance in both recent years and historic times. However, several zones on the island may contain cultural artifacts--notably, the Fire Island Lighthouse tract, buried soil horizons in interdunal and secondary dune areas, former inlet locations, and buried sediments in salt marshes. The survey report recommends that the lighthouse tract undergo additional subsurface testing prior to development and that a professional archaeologist be present to monitor disturbance in the other areas.

The waters off Long Island rank second only to those off Cape Hatteras as a graveyard of ships on the Atlantic coast of eastern North America. Underwater archaeological surveys almost certainly would reveal many maritime artifacts.

An archaeological survey, including investigations of the Floyd Estate, is in progress to identify where historic and prehistoric sites may be found and to evaluate their significance. It is scheduled for completion June 1, 1977.